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BPA prepares to help California in Stage 3 Emergency

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Bonneville Power Administration

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PORTLAND, Ore. – At approximately 2 p.m. today, California is expected to declare a Stage 3 power emergency due to high temperatures and electricity shortages in the state. Stage 3 is the most serious stage and will mean, that without relief, power blackouts will occur in some areas of the state. Stage 3 is called only after all other steps have been taken, such as calls for voluntary conservation and interruption of nonfirm power.

The Bonneville Power Administration is doing what it can to assist California in this emergency, and certain Northwest fish operations may have to be curtailed briefly under emergency operation procedures. It is likely that some of the water spilled to help fish passage at lower Columbia River dams may have to be diverted through generators to produce power for California. If so, this would be short term, possibly four to six hours. BPA Administrator Judi Johansen stressed, "The emergency is very real. I have been assured it is a human health and safety issue. The elderly, sick and infants are particularly vulnerable in extreme temperatures when there are power failures. We are monitoring the situation and will do everything we can to minimize the length of time Northwest fish operations are curtailed."

Johansen emphasized that the Northwest itself is in no immediate danger of blackouts, but its system also is stretched and could possibly face shortages this winter if extreme cold temperatures occur. In this case, the Northwest would need to call on California to supply power as has been done in the past. Because the Northwest and California needs peak in different seasons, the two regions have a history of reciprocal power swaps.

Johansen said conservation of electricity is always a good idea, but the immediate problem is one of transmission and generation location. Because the Northwest transmission grid is under stress, particularly in the northeast sector of the region, the only way to help California without putting Northwest reliability at risk is to increase electricity generation in the lower Columbia area, near the AC and DC interties that carries power south.

Future stresses on both the Northwest and California power systems may not be so directly tied to transmission issues. For this reason, BPA is urging Northwest citizens and businesses to increase common sense actions to reduce electricity use.

The measures that BPA is likely to take have been outlined in emergency guidelines set by the Technical Team that oversees the fish protection measures for the Federal Columbia River Power System.

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